

Top Telehealth Tips and Lessons Learned – Episode 8

SPEAKER: Hello and welcome to Top Telehealth Tips and Lessons Learned, part of the Telehealth Learning and Discussion Series for Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery Support Providers.

This project is brought to you by the Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network, the Center for Excellence on Protected Health Information, the National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers, and the Center for the Application of Substance Abuse Technologies at the University of Nevada Reno in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Today's speakers are Nancy Roget and Paul Warren. Ms. Roget has served as the executive director of the Center for the Application of Substance Abuse Technologies at the University of Nevada Reno since 2006. She was formerly the director of the Mountain West ATTC Regional Center and the National Frontier and Rural ATTC. She is currently the co-director of the Mountain Plain ATTC Regional Center.

Mr. Warren is a research project director at the New York State Psychiatric Institute Division of Substance Use Disorders in association with Columbia University. He is a project manager for the Northeast and Caribbean ATTC. Nancy and Paul discuss the top five tips for managing expectations and coping with the challenges of transitioning to telehealth.

PAUL WARREN: Thank you so much. Nancy and I are delighted to be here. And actually, Nancy is going to start us off right now.

NANCY ROGET: Thanks, Paul. We're excited to talk about the top five tips for self-care, hope matters. And really, what we're going to be talking about today is how learning a new technology, providing services differently, can cause stress. And so, let me go through the definition of self-care. The Oxford Living Dictionary defines self-care as a practice of taking action to preserve or improve one's own health, well-being and happiness.

And so, when we really start looking, diving deeper into self-care, we're looking at self-care includes limiting your negative outcomes, so guarding against things that cause more stress, promoting broad, positive outcomes by maintaining or enhancing well-being and overall functioning, and then really the last piece I really like is about taking proactive steps to enhance resilience and overall well-being.

And so, when we think about that, we're really focusing on our work as counselors. So we're not even talking about adding technology to it at this point but just our work as counselors and as people who provide health care or clinical services.

We now know that just by listening or facilitating counseling or therapeutic sessions, listening to patients or clients or peers' stories, collecting data as far as people's drug and alcohol histories, let's say, providing treatment services with kindness and empathy, that clinicians do take on some level of their client's pain.

And that's what can cause, like listening and being empathic and being kind and helping people, really can cause what's the term is compassion fatigue. And compassion fatigue is defined as the emotional and physical fatigue experienced by professionals due to their chronic use of empathy and helping others in distress.

And so, here's sort of the controversial piece of that. So by doing our work as clinicians and therapists and peer support specialists, just by doing that very work, is what causes compassion fatigue. And it attacks the very core of what brings helpers into this work, which is our empathy and our compassion for others. And so that's the controversy about providing services.

PAUL WARREN: Thanks so much, Nancy. You know, I'm struck by the point that, the very fact that we're doing this work, the fact that we are being empathetic, the fact that we do offer compassion, puts us at risk actually being unable to be empathetic and to be compassionate.

We felt given the nature of our current situation, it was important to maybe go over a few tips that people could keep in mind as we thrive and protect ourselves where we are now and as we make the transition hopefully through where we are now. One of those is calming yourself and realizing that even in the most easy times, learning how to use new technology is challenging and that the fact is is that we're all in a process of learning.

Some people are perhaps a little further ahead than others. And it's going to really require practice, practice, practice in order to use these video conferencing technologies, being able to work with people over the telephone. And there's a lot of support to actually help people to do that.

But you can really kind of talk yourself down and remind yourself that you can learn this. You can use these resources like fact sheets. You can go to other resources and get other information so that you can allow yourself to be in a learning process and increase your confidence as you do this work.

Also, it's really important as you document your interactions with people that you're documenting the fact that due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, this is the way you are interacting with this person. And first and foremost, we do want to make sure that we're protecting people's confidentiality and that we are using best practices regardless of whether the guidelines have been relaxed at this particular point or not.

And I'm struck by a point that you've made in the past, Nancy, about how it's not the technology that's HIPAA compliant, it's how people use the technology. So I really appreciate that you've underlined that point a number of times. So folks, one, calm yourself. You're in a learning process. Talk yourself into you can do this. And there are resources for you to be able to do that.

Also, you're in the position of offering compassion and empathy to others. Consider offering that same kind of compassion to yourself, extending kindness to yourself, reminding yourself that you are part of a common humanity, that you're not the only person experiencing this at this particular time, and that you're not alone. You know, one of the benefits of having the talks that we've had is that people have been able to come together and share their successes and their challenges.

Also, if you haven't done this in the past, this is a wonderful time to be able to develop your own sense of mindfulness so that you can maintain a healthy balance for yourself and realize, you know something? I'm kind of at my max. And I need to do something to be compassionate to myself, to care for myself.

Also, being very clear that there's a difference between self-compassion and self-centeredness. If you are being compassionate, if you are taking care of yourself, it is going to make it more possible for you to provide the best services possible to the people you have the opportunity to help and be present for.

And also, considering a self-care plan. Now I'm sure many of us are very familiar with talking with our patients, our clients, our participants, about you know, exercise, nutrition, sleep, creative endeavors, spiritual activity, social supports. You know we know that having these things in place actually help people to manage difficulties better, help them to be able to do their jobs better.

So here's an opportunity for us to really follow our own advice and make sure that we have the self-care plan for ourselves and being clear about what that plan is, perhaps engaging in activities, hobbies, relationships that restore your energy.

And also, focusing on the idea that maybe there is a plan that you have as you move from work, whether you're working at home or whether you're going into the office, as you transition into not being at work because it is stressful to be working 24/7. So

really focus on having a plan to make that transition. Leave your work at work. And really investing the time because you're worth it to have this self-care plan in place.

NANCY ROGET: Thanks, Paul, for tips one, two and three. I think those are really helpful. Tip four is try a little mindfulness. And certainly, people are learning more about mindfulness. And let me do a quick definition.

So mindfulness is a state of being present through attention and awareness without judgment or other common filters. All of us are aware we have all these thoughts going on almost all the time. And we sometimes are unaware of how much negativity and how much judgment is going on in these thoughts.

And so we're recommending in tip four that you try a little mindfulness training, and mindfulness training has been found to reduce clinicians' experience of stress, negative affect, worrying about things and anxiety. Mindfulness training allows us to take time away and engage in self-care. Mindfulness plays a significant role as a protective factor.

And there are specific tips that you can do that help decrease stress. And so there's a great resource that we found. And the link to it is on this slide. It's called quick exercises and tips for using mindfulness at work. And they've got exercises like checking in with your five senses, doing three-minute breathing, doing a body scan, a self-compassion pause, and then mindfulness in meetings.

And when you look at this resource, it'll be very familiar to you because it's some of the tips that you use with your patients or with peers. Like when people get in a situation where they're starting to feel retraumatized, we give them very specific exercises to do to get themselves grounded.

And so this is about helping to ground ourselves when we start to worry, like, oh, my gosh, am I going to be able to do this work at home? Is it too stressful? Those type of things. So sort of practicing, Paul, what we preach, basically.

PAUL WARREN: Yeah. Absolutely. And Nancy, would it be fair to say that a lot of these exercises really don't require any particular skill or training? These are just intentional activities that people can engage in and decrease their stress.

NANCY ROGET: Absolutely. So it'd be things like name one thing that you see. And you repeat this to yourself. This is what I see in front of me. This is what I'm feeling the chair that I'm sitting in, on a coffee that I'm drinking. So it takes you away from these negative thoughts that really disrupt our ability to be empathic and and to be kind.

PAUL WARREN: So these are really opportunities to become grounded and present in the moment.

NANCY ROGET: Yes, absolutely.

PAUL WARREN: Thank you. Thanks so much, Nancy. So folks, the other you know tip 5 here is the idea of promoting hope and community. You know that's something that we can as as we can do mindfulness activities, we can also be intentionally aware of the language that we're using.

And we can avoid indulging in perhaps negative language. And certainly, it's probably going to be necessary for all of us to talk about COVID-19. And we can focus on the facts as opposed to amplifying the fear in regard to that.

And you know, it's so wonderful to know, because we are talking about people who work in the substance use disorder workforce, that the Big Book, the AA Big Book, mentions hope 43 times. And I'm going to read this little quote because you know you've provided it in this excellent resource.

"Our hope is that many alcoholic men and women desperately in need will see these pages. And we believe that it is only by fully disclosing ourselves and our problems that we will be persuaded to say, yes, I am one of them, too. I must have this thing."

And again, that really speaks to the fact that we are all part of this community making this adjustment to taking care of ourselves because we're under stress and also continuing to provide services to our clients, patients and consumers.

Also, SAMHSA's 10 guiding recovery principles include hope. And never lose sight of the fact that the work you're doing, the community that you're part of, is important, that what you are doing is making a difference in the lives of your colleagues, in the lives of the people that you're providing services to. And you are keeping the lights on in order to do that.

You can also be an advocate in your workplace to help support practices that are going to help people to manage these situations. Offer peer support. Also, being aware that we want to consider and apply trauma-informed principles in the workplace. Because again, this is a difficult situation for everyone. And we don't want anyone to be additionally traumatized.

And just a quick recap of these five points, and then we'd like to share a couple of quotes with you. Tip one calm yourself. Use positive self-talk. Remind yourself that you can do this and that you have the resources available to learn what you need to

learn. Practice self-compassion. Develop and use your self-care plan. Try a little mindfulness.

Again, Nancy went over some very helpful and pretty simple-to-do activities in order to ground yourself, keep you in the present and remind yourself that you are part of a community that's making a difference. And it is possible for you to choose to promote hope. Nancy, is there anything you'd like to add to this before we move on to the quote?

NANCY ROGET: No, Paul, I just think that five tips are really helpful for folks. And this is about dealing with a national epidemic and learning new skills or how to deliver the skills you already know how to do. So I want to remind you that those competencies haven't gone away. You know how to provide peer support. You know how to do counseling and interventions and take histories and do patient placement criteria and do those dang case notes.

You know how to do all of that. You're just being asked to use a technology and to reach out to patients and clients and peers in a different manner. So you got it. It's just reminding yourself that we're having to do it maybe a little bit differently and then how to manage the stress that goes along with that.

PAUL WARREN: Yeah, and those resources are available. And people can do this. They do have it. So folks, we'd like to share two quotes with you. The first one is "It is only in our darkest hours that we may discover the true strength of the brilliant light within ourselves that can never, ever be dim." And the second one is "Refueling of the light should be done regularly through self-care activities."

These quotes in some way encapsulate and summarize where we are at this particular moment and the actions that we can take in order to make sure that we can continue to do the jobs that we're committed to doing.

SPEAKER: Thank you so much for joining us today. For a transcript of this podcast, presentation slides and other related resources, please visit our website at www.telehealthready.org. This podcast is supported by funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and Health Resources and Services Administration.

Its contents are solely the responsibility of the presenters and do not necessarily represent the official views of HHS, SAMHSA, or HRSA. Information shared and views expressed reflect the speaker's best understanding of science and promising practices and should not be seen as directives.

We encourage all listeners to reflect on the contexts discussed during the series and to take that information to colleagues and/or supervisors for further discussion, especially in the context of state rules and regulations. In addition, content related to privacy and security and 42 CFR Part 2 presented during these sessions should not be construed as legal advice. And listeners are directed to discuss recommendations with their agency's legal counsel.

Finally, listeners should consult SAMHSA resources that provide additional information regarding delivering services virtually. Once again, thank you to our listeners for tuning in today. We hope that you'll join us again.